

IN THE CLAIMS:

Please CANCEL claims 2 and 6 without prejudice to or disclaimer of their subject matter. Please AMEND claims 1, 5, 9, and 11, and ADD claims 16 and 17 as follows.

1. (Currently Amended) An image forming apparatus comprising:  
image bearing means for bearing a toner image;  
transfer means for transferring the toner image on the image bearing means onto a sheet;  
fixing means for fixing to the sheet the toner image transferred by the transfer means; and  
sheet transport guide means for transporting a sheet placed along a sheet transport path between the transfer means and the fixing means,  
wherein a sheet transport speed in the fixing means is set lower than a sheet transport speed in the transfer means; and  
wherein the sheet transport guide means is capable of forming a plurality of curves on the sheet between the transfer means and the fixing means in such a manner that:  
in a downstream side of the transfer means, an upward curve protruding upwardly from a tangential line to a nip portion of the transfer means is formed; and  
in an upstream side of the fixing means, a downward curve downwardly protruding from the tangential line to the nip portion of the fixing means is formed.

Claim 2. (Cancelled)

3. (Original) The image forming apparatus according to claim 1, wherein the sheet transport guide means forms the upward curve and the downward curve to be alternate on the sheet.

4. (Original) The image forming apparatus according to claim 1, wherein the transfer means comprises:

an intermediate transfer member onto which the toner image on the image bearing means is primary-transferred; and

secondary transfer means for secondary-transferring the toner image on the intermediate transfer member onto the sheet, the secondary transfer means being a transfer roller that is applied with a high pressure and is in contact with the intermediate transfer member when transferring the toner image to the sheet.

5. (Currently Amended) An image forming apparatus comprising:

image bearing means for bearing a toner image;

transfer means for transferring the toner image on the image bearing means onto the sheet;

fixing means for fixing to the sheet the toner image transferred by the transfer means; and

a first sheet transport guide and a second sheet transport guide sequentially arranged ~~disposed~~ from an upstream side of a transport direction of the sheet along a transport path of the sheet between the transfer means and the fixing means,

wherein a sheet transport speed in the fixing means is set lower than a sheet transport speed in the transfer means,

the first sheet transport guide is disposed with a tilt with respect to a horizontal direction or a vertical direction[[,]] and the downstream-side end portion of the first sheet transport guide is positioned in substantially the center between the transfer means and the fixing means,

the second sheet transport guide is disposed with a tilt with respect to the horizontal direction or the vertical direction;~~and,~~ and

a gap is provided to form a spacing sufficient to permit curves of the sheet to be formed between a downstream-side end portion of the first sheet transport guide and an upstream-side end portion of the second sheet transport guide.

Claim 6. (Cancelled)

7. (Original) The image forming apparatus according to claim 5, wherein a guide surface of the second sheet transport guide comprises: a flat face extending in the horizontal direction or the vertical direction in the upstream-side end portion; and a sloped face continuing from the flat face.

8. (Original) The image forming apparatus according to claim 5, wherein a tilt angle in the sheet transport direction of the first sheet transport guide is set smaller than an angle of outputting the sheet that is output from the transfer means.

9. (Currently Amended) The image forming apparatus according to claim 5, wherein the gap between the first sheet transport guide and the second sheet transport guide is ranged from 5 mm to 20 mm.

10. (Original) The image forming apparatus according to claim 5, wherein the transfer means comprises:

an intermediate transfer member onto which the toner image on the image bearing means is primary-transferred; and

secondary transfer means for secondary-transferring the toner image on the intermediate transfer member onto the sheet, the secondary transfer means being a transfer roller that is applied with a high pressure and is in contact with the intermediate transfer member when transferring the toner image to the sheet.

11. (Currently Amended) An image forming apparatus comprising:  
transfer means for transferring a toner image onto a sheet;  
fixing means for fixing to the sheet the toner image transferred by the transfer means; and

a first sheet transport guide and a second sheet transport guide ~~disposed~~ sequentially arranged from an upstream side of a transport direction of the sheet along a transport path of the sheet between the transfer means and the fixing means,

wherein a sheet transport speed in the fixing means is set lower than a sheet transport speed in the transfer means,

both an output direction of the sheet to be output from the transfer means and a tilt direction in a sheet transport direction of the first sheet transport guide are set downwardly from a horizontal direction,

both an entering direction of the sheet into the fixing means and a tilt direction in a sheet transport direction of the second sheet transport guide are set upwardly from the horizontal direction, and

a rear-end portion of the first sheet transport guide is positioned in substantially the center between the transfer means and the fixing means and is positioned upwardly from a front-end portion of the second sheet transport guide, ~~whereby forming~~ whereby forming a spacing sufficient to permit curves of the sheet to be formed ~~is formed~~.

12. (Original) The image forming apparatus according to claim 11, wherein a tilt angle in the sheet transport direction of the first sheet transport guide is set smaller than an angle of outputting the sheet that is output from the transfer means.

13. (Original) The image forming apparatus according to claim 11, wherein the transfer means comprises:

an intermediate transfer member onto which the toner image on the image bearing means is primary-transferred; and

secondary transfer means for secondary-transferring the toner image on the intermediate transfer member onto the sheet, the secondary transfer means being a transfer roller

that is applied with a high pressure and is in contact with the intermediate transfer member when transferring the toner image to the sheet.

14. (Original) The image forming apparatus according to any one of claims 5 to 13, wherein the first sheet transport guide comprises a plurality of ribs on a sheet transport surface, and grounded metal surfaces are exposed in regions of the transport surface other than the ribs of the first sheet transport guide.

15. (Original) The image forming apparatus according to any one of claims 5 to 13, wherein a plurality of rotational members are disposed in a downstream-side end portion of the first sheet transport guide in the sheet transport direction, the plurality of rotational members being passively rotated through transport operation of the sheet without disturbing the transport operations of the sheet.

16. (New) An image forming apparatus comprising:  
image bearing means for bearing a toner image;  
transfer means for transferring the toner image on the image bearing means onto a sheet;  
fixing means for fixing to the sheet the toner image transferred by the transfer means; and

a first sheet transport guide and a second sheet transport guide sequentially arranged from an upstream side of a transport direction of the sheet along a transport path of the sheet between the transfer means and the fixing means,

wherein a sheet transport speed in the fixing means is set lower than a sheet transport speed in the transfer means,

the first sheet transport guide is disposed with a tilt with respect to a horizontal direction or a vertical direction,

the second sheet transport guide is disposed with a tilt with respect to the horizontal direction or the vertical direction,

a guide surface of the second sheet transport guide comprises a flat face extending in the horizontal direction or the vertical direction in the upstream side end portion and a sloped face continuing from the flat face, and

a gap is provided to form a spacing sufficient to permit curves of the sheet to be formed between a downstream side end portion of the first sheet transport guide and an upstream side end portion of the second sheet transport guide.

17. (New) An image forming apparatus comprising:

image bearing means for bearing a toner image;

transfer means for transferring the toner image on the image bearing means onto a sheet;

fixing means for fixing to the sheet the toner image transferred by the transfer means; and

a first sheet transport guide and a second sheet transport guide sequentially arranged from an upstream side of a transport direction of the sheet along a transport path of the sheet between the transfer means and the fixing means,

wherein a sheet transport speed in the fixing means is set lower than a sheet transport speed in the transfer means,

the first sheet transport guide is disposed with a tilt with respect to a horizontal direction or a vertical direction,

the second sheet transport guide is disposed with a tilt with respect to the horizontal direction or the vertical direction,

a tilt angle in the sheet transport direction of the first sheet transport guide is set smaller than an angle of outputting the sheet that is output from the transfer means, and

a gap is provided to form a spacing sufficient to permit curves of the sheet to be formed between a downstream side end portion of the first sheet transport guide and an upstream side end portion of the second sheet transport guide.